

Shadow Cliffs & Me
Biana Toussaint

With each step I take, I fall further into a memory.

I haven't been to this lake in a while, but I still recall wading through the shallow waters and spitting out the taste of salt. I remember eating hotdogs while waiting to dry. I remember racing my brother back and forth along the lake. I remember the sand getting stuck *everywhere*. I don't remember it quite like this.

The sun is quietly falling now. Concrete peels away at my sandals. My face is dry with the last rays of heat, but my heart is heavy.

Everything is so different. The directional signs are fading into gray. The picnic tables are empty, the families long gone. The remaining swimmers are leaving the lake, allowing their wrinkly bodies some rest. A girl guards her sandcastle from the tides. It reminds me of someone.

My memory is just a photo, dated by the passing of time. Now, it's as if every crack is slightly misplaced, and every rock replaced. Every smile belongs to somebody else. As I near the shore, I feel like every wave wishes to reach a different part of me. Someone who could gleefully run into the water and bask in what opportunity has been given to her.

I can't bring myself to, so instead I take a seat at the edge. I let the tide run across my feet as it recedes and returns. I take a fistful of sand and watch the grains slowly escape my palm. As I do, I realize the little girl is staring at me from afar. She's bucktoothed, with four big braids sprouting from her head. She holds a shovel that doesn't belong to her.

She looks back down at her sandcastle. Now that I'm closer, I can see that it's unfinished. How long has it been that way? I stand up. She glances at me and hands me her shovel. I take it and I begin to haul sand over. She packs in spots of sand to create towers. As they crumble and fall, I build them back up for her. I make a moat, connecting it to the lake, as she picks out the prettiest seashells to decorate with. The time flies as we work in harmony.

Once we're done, our castle stands sturdy. It has a combination of childlike perfection and youthful carelessness, looking almost angelic in the setting sun. I can't help but smile. When I turn to share my joy with her, she's there but she doesn't look the same. She's taller, with bob-like braids and eyes surrounded by dark lines. But she's still the same girl.

I know eventually the tide will take my castle, just as every day takes childhood away. But, I also know that the child in me will never leave. No matter how distant she feels. She just changes like the lake.